

THE MALAY PRESS REPORTING RACE AND RELIGION IN MALAYSIA AND GENERAL ELECTION IN 2013

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This paper traces the political role of the Malay press from pre- to post-independence Malaysia. Malay newspapers have been championing the Malay causes in politics, economy, social and culture, however, they have been always under the influence of ruling party, Barisan Nasional (BN) and United Malay National Organisation (UMNO). The state has set the agenda for the Malay-Muslim, even to decide on the interpretation of Islam. Therefore, this paper highlights the issues of race and religion as covered by the Malay press during the 13th general election, from nomination day on 20 April 2013 until polling day on 5 May 2013. These two issues were chosen in order to understand their link to the Malay and Islamisation agenda of the state. Three newspapers were selected for this study namely *Utusan Malaysia*, *Berita Harian* and *Sinar Harian*. It is clear that all three newspapers gave special coverage for the Malays and Islam from the *Sunni* doctrine. In the coverage, the *Utusan Malaysia* and *Berita Harian*, owned by UMNO-linked companies, were biased for the BN and UMNO which considered as the protector of Islam. They were also very critical to Pakatan Rakyat (PR), a loose coalition of the Islamic Party (PAS), People Justice Party (PKR), and Democratic Action Party (DAP) who were against each other on agenda. *Sinar Harian*, owned by a no-linked company to political party, however tried to balance the coverage for BN and PR and gave opportunity for both coalitions to argue and debate on the Malay and Islamic issues. It is obvious that the issues of race and religion were used by political parties especially BN to gain supports and votes in the general election. Based on the success of BN in winning the majority of Malay seats, especially in rural areas, it proves that the Malay press played a significant role in determining the election result.

Keywords: Print media, Malay newspapers, Islam, Malaysia, the 13th General Election.

Introduction

On 5 May 2013, the 13th general election was held which is approximately five years after the most exciting general election in 2008. The 12th general election was held on 8 March 2008. The Election Commission (EC) (2008) announced that five states out of 13 states in Malaysia had fallen to the opposition parties; Islamic Party (PAS), People Justice Party (PKR) and Democratic Action Party (DAP). These opposition parties later established an alliance called Pakatan Rakyat (PR). Among the five states, Kelantan was not as surprising as it has been under the PAS since the 1990 general election. However, the Barisan Nasional (BN) was defeated in Perak, Kedah, Penang and Selangor which shocked the whole country. This marked the biggest failure ever in BN's history. In terms of parliamentary seats, BN won only 142 out of 222 seats, or more importantly, BN lost its two third majority for the first time since the 1969 general election.

However, the 13th general election was even worst for BN at federal level, although at the state level United Malay National Organisation (UMNO) managed to increase its seats. According to Election Commission (EC), over 85 percent of the country's 13.3 million eligible voters went to the polls on 5 May 2013. The 13th general election saw BN win with 133 parliamentary seats and retain federal power with minus 7 seats from the last election total of 140 seats. PR garnered a total of 89 seats, an increase of 7 seats from the 2008 election when it secured 82 seats. However, BN managed to get 275 state seats and won in Perak, while PR won a total of 229 seats. But PR lost Kedah to BN, but managed to secure two-third of the state seats in Kelantan, Penang and Selangor (Election Commission, 2013; Augustin, 2013).¹ In comparison with its performance in the 2008 election, UMNO performed magnificently and managed to increase the seats won in the 2013 election from 79 to 88 parliamentary seats and 239 to 244 state seats. Therefore, it proves that the Malays backed UMNO.² The roles of Malay press somehow can be claimed as one of the reasons contributing to the success of UMNO in gaining more seats.

In addition, freedom of the press was one of the main issues raised especially by the oppositions and BERSIH, a movement for free and fair election. In other words, media should be acknowledged to report news ideally by performing to check and balance of the government. Therefore, the roles to check and balance of the government should be the main concern because people have the right to know the truth about all issues particularly those debated by the ruling and opposition parties which involve public interests. Media's level of reporting to the ruling and opposition parties during pre-election period creates a situation that needs to be studied. This paper will scrutinise the Malay print media's slant towards political parties during election campaign period to measure the level of biasness of each newspaper respectively. These Malay print media are; the *Utusan Malaysia*, *Berita Harian*, and *Sinar Harian*.

This paper will highlight the development of Malay press in Malaysia. Next it will examine how the media set their agenda of coverage for the issues of race and religion. The review shows that the Malay press' main focus is Malay-Muslim issues in Malaysia that are aligned with the Islamisation agenda of the state. In identifying the level of biasness that occurred in the press reporting in the three Malay newspapers studied, this paper will analyse the articles, including news reports, editorial items, opinion pieces, advertisements and letters from the readers, published in these three newspapers during the election period. The period of analysis starts from the nomination day on 20 April 2013 until the polling day on 5 May 2013. This paper will categorise the print media tendencies towards political parties by using five main categories notably positive BN (BN+), negative BN (BN-), positive PR (PR+), negative PR (PR-) and neutral (N). These tendencies are then summed up to show the total stance of each newspaper respectively whether it favours the ruling party, the opponent or is neutral.

The data or articles were coded using sentence-level content analysis (provide examples of a BN+, BN- and Neutral sentence). This is important especially in determining whether for example the article is coded BN+ or PR- (it can go either way unless sentence-level analysis can show that, for instance, the article is focusing more for BN+ rather than PR- after calculation of sentences were made and decided).

¹ Kamaruddin Mohamed Baria, the EC Secretary, explained that based on the voter turnout for Parliamentary seats, BN managed to garner 5,237,699 votes, PKR with 2,254,328 votes, PAS 1,633,389 votes, and DAP 1,736,267 votes. For the State seats, BN received 4,513,997, PAS with 2,133,944 votes, DAP 1,442,298 votes, and PKR 1,303,457 votes. Therefore, in regard to popular votes, PR received more votes than the BN. PR managed to get 5,623,984 votes or 50.87 percent of the total votes, BN got 5,237,699 votes or 47.38 percent, and others received 192,892 votes or 1.74 percent (Election Commission, 2013; Augustin, 2013).

² BN actually had won the polls on the back of voters from a largely conservative rural Malaysia particularly in Sabah and Sarawak as well as UMNO voters with an interest in the continuation of affirmative action policies. Malaysian Chinese Association (MCA) and Gerakan actually suffered tremendously due to urban votes swung to the PR. To prove this, in urban Selangor and Penang, PR increased its mandate. PR's increased majorities in Penang and Selangor tell a story of a middle class and urban electorate from all races moving away from BN. UMNO and BN also had a major blow in urban Johor with largely urban and multiracial votes. PR also made inroads into Sabah, significantly in urban areas. PR won in places like Kuala Lumpur, Shah Alam, Ipoh, Alor Setar, Kuantan, Kota Melaka, Seremban, Kuching, Kota Kinabalu, and Kuala Terengganu which have large number of multiracial urbanites.

Through sentence-level content analysis, coders had to calculate the words and sentences before determining the correct category for each article. This process was monitored closely to ensure reliability of the data. Random checking was also performed after getting the preliminary result. Therefore, the process was rigorous in order to get the actual final result or finding of this research. Articles were categorised according to several code lists under two main lists: 1) political background such as names of political leaders and candidates, political parties, organisations, constituencies and states; and (2) political issues such as race/ethnicity, religion, ideology, social, economy, politics, security, policy, legislation and local issues.

First, the coders identified and collated all articles on the election. Each article was coded based on three elements:

1. Which political party was the article intended for?
2. Under what code lists would the article be identified?
3. Was the article supportive, neutral or negative towards any political party?

For articles in which the coders had difficulty to decide on the category, deliberations were conducted to decide and random checks on articles analysed were performed to ensure consistency and reliability in the coding. As most of the articles culled for analysis were not available online, this research relied of the coders' ability to manually count and code the articles sentence by sentence as specified in the coding lists. Microsoft Excel 2010 was used to calculate the total number and percentage of selected articles in all the categories.

The issues highlighted for this paper are only related to issues of race and religion during the 13th general election in 2013. The focus on the issue of race and religion over other issues is due to this paper's efforts to understand the roles of Malay press in reporting and projecting the Malay and Islamic agenda practised in the country. Several articles will be chosen to show the approaches and agenda of those Malay presses.

The Situation of Malay Press in Malaysia

The implication of media policy in Malaysia under Mahathir's leadership, and also his successors Prime Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi and Najib Tun Razak, was that many local newspapers, especially daily newspapers, are either controlled or owned by the Barisan Nasional (BN or National Front- previously known as the Perikatan party until 1 June 1974) party in order to dominate the public sphere of the media. For the Malay press, the *Utusan Malaysia* is published by Utusan Melayu (M) Berhad, a company that also owns the *Utusan Melayu* and *Kosmo* newspapers, which has a special relationship with the ruling UMNO, the main component party in BN (Azizuddin, 2010). Meanwhile, the *Sinar Harian* is a daily newspaper published in Shah Alam, Selangor. It first hit the newsstands on March 31, 2006 in Kelantan and Terengganu before expanding its distribution to the state of Selangor and Kuala Lumpur in the West Coast in September 2007. *Sinar Harian* is published by Akhbar Cabaran Sdn Bhd, a company related to the Kumpulan Karangraf and Ultimate Group of Companies, a major publishing interest in Malaysia. It is not clear whether the *Sinar Harian* has direct link to either of political coalitions, the BN or PR. In 2007, Media Prima Berhad, with close link to UMNO, acquired all the private television stations including *TV3*, *NTV7*, *8TV* and *TV9*. It also has a 43 percent equity interest in The New Straits Times Press (Malaysia) Berhad (NSTP), one of Malaysia's largest publishing groups that publishes leading newspaper titles such as the *New Straits Times*, *Berita Harian* and *Harian Metro*.

Freedom of the press is formally assured by Part II of the Federal Constitution under Article 10(1) entitled 'Freedom of Speech, Assembly and Association'. However, Section 2 of the Article limits the right where Parliament may by law impose restrictions as it deems necessary or expedient in the interest of the security of the Federation, friendly relations with other countries, public order or morality and restrictions designed to protect the privileges of Parliament or of any Legislative Assembly or to provide against contempt of court, defamation, or incitement to any offence.

Meanwhile, the amendments to the PPPA came into operation on 15 July 2012. One provision modifies the Minister's absolute discretion on the issuance of printing and publication permits. Another revokes the requirement for annual renewal of such permits. In addition, there is a right to be heard before any revocation of permit, and any decision of the Minister in this regard is subject to judicial review (SUHAKAM, 2013: 83). This is a bigger step to achieve press freedom, but there are other laws that can still limit the press such as the Sedition Act 1948 and Official Secret Act 1972.

Under the SA of Malaysia, sedition could be committed in any of the following ways: inciting disaffection against any Malay Ruler or government; inciting unlawful changes to any lawful matter; inciting contempt for the administration of justice; raising discontent among the people; promoting ill-will between races or classes, or questioning 'sensitive issues' such as citizenship, the national language, special privileges of Malays and natives of Sabah and Sarawak and the status of the Malay Rulers (Kamali, 1998: 278). For instance, section 9(1) states that anyone can be prosecuted for publishing in any presses material considered by the Court as seditious. The government under current Prime Minister, Najib Razak, proposed to repeal the SA and replace it with a new law, supposed to be, called the National Harmony Act (SUHAKAM, 2013: 84). However, since the end of the 13th general election, it seems that the government has decided to retain the SA after mounting pressures from UMNO hardliners demanding to not abolish the SA. Thus, clearly Najib broke his promise to abolish the law.

The Official Secrets Act (OSA) defines an official secret as any documents of the Cabinet, State Executive Council and documents concerning national security, defence and international relations. Under section 2 defines official secret as any official letters, information, and other material which is classified by the Minister, the Chief Minister of state or appointed public officers as 'Top Secret', 'Secret', 'Confidential' or 'Restricted'. In April 1999, Deputy Prime Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi (later became Prime Minister of Malaysia from 2003-2009) stated that he would issue guidelines to government media officers to clarify that the OSA should not be used by officials to suppress information from the public (Amnesty International, 1999). It is not clear whether such guidelines exist and are being implemented.

Malay Press Reporting on Race and Religion

In the Malay-language press, represented by *Utusan Malaysia* and *Berita Harian*, including *Sinar Harian*, there is a noticeable absence of any discourse on religions other than Islam, stopping short of announcing themselves as 'Islamic' newspapers (Merican, 2005). Ahmad Murad Merican (2005) argues that Malay idea about Islam as portrayed in the Malay dailies are largely confined to Malay society, in that Islam is viewed as monolithic, and the only legitimate faith in Malaysia and for the Malays. For instance, one main issue that raised considerable concerns over the exercise of religious freedom and expression in multiracial Malaysia is the controversy on the use of the word 'Allah'. A seven-judge panel in the Federal Court ruled on 23 June 2014 that the Appeal Court's decision siding with the government stood. In a 4-3 majority decision, rejected the Catholic Church's bid to get leave to challenge the Home Ministry's ban on the use of the word for 'The Herald' (The Star Online, 2014). In January 2008, the Malaysian cabinet banned a Catholic newspaper, 'The Herald', from using the word 'Allah' in their publications. The Malaysian government justified the restrictions on the basis that the word 'Allah' refers to God according to the Muslim faith, and as such its use by non-Muslims may poke on sensitivities and create confusion among Muslims in the country (The Sun, 2008: 1). The issues of Shiism and 'Allah' have affected the practices of religious freedom in Malaysia. The United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) 2014 Annual Report placed Malaysia on Tier 2, one level down from Tier 1 (countries of particular concern) which lists countries like Myanmar, China, Iran, Iraq, Pakistan and Sudan, among others. USCIRF found that the intertwining of religion, ethnicity, and politics in Malaysia complicate religious freedom protections for religious minorities and non-Sunni Muslims (Zachariah, 2014a).

Although the state controlled by UMNO has always been in the roles to enforce Islam to Muslims in Malaysia, since the post-2008 general election, many Malay rights' groups such as Pertubuhan Peribumi Perkasa (PERKASA), Pertubuhan Kebajikan Islamiah dan Dakwah (PEKIDA), and Ikatan Muslimin Malaysia (ISMA) emerged vocally championing the issues of Islam and Malays. They have great supports from the Malay press particularly *Utusan Malaysia* owned by UMNO because of the similar or close-linked issues that they struggle for. For instance, the Malay daily, *Utusan Malaysia*, carried a front-page article on 7 May 2011, headlined '*Kristian agama rasmi?*' (Christianity the official religion?), claiming that the opposition Democratic Action Party (DAP) was conspiring with Christian leaders to take over Putrajaya and abolish Islam as the religion of the federation. The report, based entirely on unsubstantiated blog postings from 'Bigdog' and 'Marahku', perceived to be pro-UMNO bloggers, argued that the DAP should be charged with sedition for allegedly trying to change the country's laws to project for a future Christian prime minister. In response to the allegation, Ibrahim Ali, the president of PERKASA – a right wing group – called for a 'crusade' against Christians who challenge 'Islam's position' in Malaysia (Chong, 2011). This event was naturally disturbing. Hishammuddin Hussein, then Home Minister, issued a warning letter to the *Utusan Malaysia* over of this report. No action has been taken to the bloggers for spreading the lie and Ibrahim Ali for hate speech against the Christians (The Underground, 2011).

The Malay group like PERKASA, UMNO and *Utusan Malaysia* have always shown solidarity in their struggle championing the issues of Malay and Islam. For example, about one hundred UMNO Youth and PERKASA members gathered in front of Utusan Melayu (M) Berhad office in Kuala Lumpur on 20 May 2011, to express support which *Utusan Malaysia* has been accused of publishing lies over issues involving opposition parties. The gathering was filled with cries of '*Hidup Melayu*', '*Hidup PERKASA*' and '*Selamatkan Utusan*', with some participants also holding posters with the words, '*Utusan Perkasa Melayu*', written on them. Seven UMNO Youth representatives led by its assistant secretary Megat Firdaus Megat Junid and seven Perkasa representatives led by its secretary-general Syed Hassan Syed Ali handed a memorandum expressing their support for *Utusan Malaysia* to the newspaper's deputy editor-in-chief II, Ahmad Abdul Hamid. Syed Hassan told reporters that one of the four main points contained in the memorandum stated that since its establishment, *Utusan Malaysia* has always fought for the agenda of national development and sovereignty and champions Malay and Islamic interests which are stipulated under Article 152(2) and 153 of the Federal Constitution (The Borneo Post, 2011: 1). Besides, on 25 April 2011, about one hundred PERKASA members and supporters held a protest outside the Malaysian Chinese Association (MCA) headquarters in Kuala Lumpur after the party's call to boycott the Malaysian Malay language daily *Utusan Malaysia*, in response to the daily's "*1 Melayu, 1 Bumi*" initiative. PERKASA secretary general Syed Hassan Syed Ali defended *Utusan Malaysia*, saying that the newspaper is not being racist as it only defended Malay rights enshrined in the constitution (Chi, 2011: 2). Therefore, UMNO and Malay groups like PERKASA seem to utilise the Malay press especially *Utusan Malaysia* as their mouthpiece for their far right agenda.

Malay Press During the 13th General Election 2013 in Reporting Race and Religion

Based on the research undertaken (see Table 1), the *Berita Harian* and *Berita Minggu* (the Sunday edition) provided the highest coverage on election issues during the campaigning period with 1,138 articles. In looking from the percentage of coverage on political parties, all Malay newspapers, except the *Sinar Harian*, gave high positive reporting to the BN with more than 40 percent. Moreover, the *Sinar Harian* provided the highest positive coverage for the PR with 25 percent. The *Utusan Malaysia*, including '*Mingguan Malaysia*' (Sunday edition), was the newspaper that gave the highest negative coverage to PR with 48 percent and there was no single negative article to the BN. What is interesting is that the *Sinar Harian* gave quite balanced coverage of both political parties. *Sinar Harian* for instance provided almost similar positive coverage to the BN and PR where the former received 27 percent and the latter received 25 percent, with a gap of 2 percent coverage. In fact, the *Sinar Harian*, including its

Sunday edition, produced the highest percentage of neutral coverage with 28 percent and above. Overall, we can declare that two Malay newspapers, the *Utusan Malaysia* and *Berita Harian*, were biased towards the ruling party. But the *Sinar Harian* was the most balanced and neutral in its coverage during the general election. None of the newspapers can be considered as bias toward the PR, but the *Utusan Malaysia* was the newspaper most biased towards the BN with 41 percent of positive BN and 48 negative PR coverage, plus the lowest neutral coverage of only 10 percent.

Table 1. The Malay Newspapers and the 2013 General Election: Total and Percentage of Coverage and Tendency toward Political Parties

NEWSPAPERS	BN +	%	BN -	%	PR +	%	PR -	%	N	%	T	%
<i>UTUSAN MALAYSIA & MINGGUAN MALAYSIA</i>	329	41	0	0	4	1	385	48	81	10	799	100
<i>BERITA HARIAN & BERITA MINGGU</i>	538	47	50	5	44	4	284	25	222	19	1138	100
<i>SINAR HARIAN</i>	154	27	20	3	145	25	81	14	178	31	578	100

Note: BN+ means positive reporting such as the praising, support or mere reports on policy and activities for BN. Meanwhile, BN- means negative reporting such as criticism and condemnation for BN. Same is applied to PR as well for PR+ and PR-. N is for neutral coverage which is about election, but not indicating toward supporting or criticising either one of the parties. % is a symbol of percentage.

Source: (Azizuddin, 2013)

Without doubt, race and religion were two important issues which circulated in the public sphere in every general election because people can easily get emotional and affected when political parties utilised or even manipulated these issues to gain votes. For the Malay press, it is obvious that the print media was used to influence and attract the Malays' attention in voting for a certain political party. As we know that the *Utusan Malaysia* and *Berita Harian* were biased toward the ruling BN, thus the issues of race and religions were utilised to attract the Malays to vote for the BN. The former published 214 articles and the latter produced 203 articles in the category of race and religion (Azizuddin, 2013). However, it is not the case for the *Sinar Harian* which published 73 articles in the same category. Without any clear link with any political parties, *Sinar Harian* seemed to report the race and religion without any intention to influence the readers to vote for any political party. Hence, the approach of reporting by the *Sinar Harian* was different compared to the other two Malay newspapers (Azizuddin, 2013).

What is interesting after analysing all the articles is that all three Malay newspapers had articles dedicated to the theme of protecting Islam. However, the *Utusan Malaysia* and *Berita Harian* went a step further by claiming that BN and UMNO were the protector of Islam. These articles, highlighted a few in Table 2, were showing that BN-UMNO is the protector of Islam and the opposition PR is destroying Islam. *Sinar Harian*, however, employed a different approach in covering the issue of Islam. *Sinar Harian* carried several articles that showed PR was also protecting Islam. *Sinar Harian* also highlighted the essential roles of Muslim scholars or *ulama* in politics (see Table 3).

Table 2. Protector of Islam

<i>Utusan Malaysia</i>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <i>BN konsisten perjuang Islam</i> (BN fights for Islam consistently, 24 April 2013), 2. <i>Saya tidak akan korbankan agama untuk politik- Najib</i> (I am not going to sacrifice religion for politics- Najib, 26 April 2013), and 3. <i>Pilih UMNO, BN selamatkan umat Islam</i> (Choose UMNO, BN protects Muslims, 26 April 2013),
<i>Berita Harian</i>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <i>UMNO Tak Biar Islam Diperlekeh</i> (UMNO will not let Islam be insulted, 23 April 2013), 2. <i>'UMNO Beri Ruang Luas Tiup Roh Islam'</i> (UMNO gives more space to spread Islam, 23 April 2013), and 3. <i>BN Tak Korban Prinsip Islam</i> (BN is not sacrificing Islamic principle, 26 April 2013)

Source: (Azizuddin, 2013)

Table 3. Sinar Harian on Islam

<i>Sinar Harian</i>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <i>Islam dimartabatkan PR Pulau Pinang: DAP</i> (Islam dignified Penang's Pakatan Rakyat, 4 May 2013) 2. <i>Ulama tersohor iktiraf Anwar</i> (The Great Muslim scholar recognises Anwar, 27 April 2013), and 3. <i>Tiada jaminan ulama menang</i> (There is no guarantee Muslim scholars will win, 29 April 2013),
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Source: (Azizuddin, 2013)

In Table 4, all three newspapers gave some coverage to the issue involving the Malay and *Bumiputera* (indigenous sons of soil). For *Utusan Malaysia* and *Berita Harian*, both newspapers claim BN and UMNO as protectors of the rights and privileges of the Malay and *Bumiputera*. *Utusan Malaysia* with articles claiming that the majority of Malay and *Bumiputera* will vote for BN. Both *Utusan Malaysia* and *Berita Harian* accused the opposition of having an intension to abolish the special rights to the Malay and *Bumiputera*. *Utusan Malaysia* and *Berita Harian* continued to claim that PR practised racism and should be rejected by the voters. The Malay press especially *Utusan Malaysia* and *Berita Harian* portrayed BN as a peace-loving coalition and protector of racial harmony in Malaysia. On the other hand, both of the newspapers blamed the opposition for provoking racial tension in the Malaysia's multiracial society. BN also seemed using the press to appeal to the non-Malays to support BN after realising that non-Malay particularly the Chinese were about to give their support to the PR. Furthermore, *Sinar Harian* tends to give more balanced coverage by allowing both coalition parties to speak about race relations and racism. It also allowed the PR to defend its position after being accused of practising racism by the BN.

Table 4. Reporting on Race Issues

<i>Utusan Malaysia</i>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <i>Majoriti Melayu sokong BN</i> (The majority of Malays support BN, 22 April 2013) 2. <i>Hak istimewa Melayu hapus jika pembangkang menang-Hasan</i> (Malay Special Rights abolished if the opposition wins, 2 May 2013), 3. <i>BN tidak main isu perkauman</i> (BN was not playing with racial issues, 22 April 2013), 4. <i>Kesamarataan DAP tidak adil, besarkan jurang kaum</i> (DAP's equality is not fair, expanding racial gap, 22 April 2013), and
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	5. <i>Mengapa tidak persoal pembangkang roboh tujuh kuil</i> (Why did not question opposition demolish seven temples, 23 April 2013)
<i>Berita Harian</i>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <i>Mahu Hapus Semua Hak Istimewa Melayu</i> (Wanting to abolish all Malay Special Rights, 2 May 2013), 2. <i>Agenda Terancang Hapus Hak Melayu</i> (Planned agenda to abolish Malay Rights, 3 May 2013) 3. <i>DAP Wujud Sentimen Kebencian Kaum</i> (DAP creates racial hatred sentiment, 23 April 2013), 4. <i>DAP Guna Melayu Bantai Melayu</i> (DAP manipulates Malays against Malays, 24 April 2013), and 5. <i>Ketiadaan Calon Melayu Bukti DAP Parti Chauvinis</i> (No Malay candidate proved DAP is a chauvinist party, 24 April 2013)
<i>Sinar Harian</i>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <i>Menjunjung ketuanan rakyat</i> (Upholding people supremacy, 28 April 2013), 2. <i>Masyarakat Cina masih keliru</i> (Chinese community is still confuse, 28 April 2013), 3. <i>Sokongan kaum India terhadap BN meningkat</i> (Supports from the Indian community increase, 3 May 2013), 4. <i>Bukan anti Melayu, bukan anti Islam, Cuma anti rasuah</i> (Not anti-Malay, not anti-Islam, just anti-corruption, 22 April 2013), and 5. <i>Elak politik perkauman dan keganasan: SPR</i> (Avoid racial politics and violence: Election Commission, 27 April 2013)

Source: (Azizuddin, 2013)

It is clear that the Malay print media was utilised to gain supports for BN and UMNO particularly in Malay-dominated seats. Politweet.org (2013) has managed to produce a finding showing that in comparing Malay-majority parliamentary seats, PR won more seats than BN in both semi-urban and urban categories, but not in rural category. A Malay-majority seat cannot be seen as a guaranteed victory for BN. However, in total of 78 Malay rural majority seats, BN managed to win 66 seats. BN was also able to win in 12 out of 27 Malay majority semi-urban seats. BN only won in 4 out of 14 Malay majority urban seats. The success of BN particularly in Malay-dominated rural areas is definitely a proof that the Malay print media was effectively dominated the public sphere among the Malay particularly in rural area. In fact, 108 out of 133 seats won by BN came from rural seats where the main source of information was coming from the newspapers controlled by the ruling party and the facilities of the Internet were less available compared to the urban and semi-urban areas. No wonder that 72 out of 89 seats won by PR came from urban and semi-urban seats where the access of Internet and online media is easily available. PR also won every Chinese-majority seat, there are only 30 Chinese-majority seats in the country, and the rest 59 seats won with the support of other races.³

MDA (2013), the apex representative body for Online Publishers, Advertising Agencies and Digital Service Providers in Malaysia and comScore, Inc. (NASDAQ: SCOR), released on 2 December 2013 its monthly ranking of Malaysian web activity at the top 30 Malaysian online properties for October 2013 based on data from the comScore Media Metrix service. In its findings, the top online news portal in Malaysia is *thestar.com.my* with 969,000 unique visitors. This is followed by *malaysiakini.com* with 906,000 and *themalaysianinsider.com* with 663,000 unique visitors respectively. For the Malay news

³ Rural is referred to villages (*kampungs*) / small towns / farmland distributed within the seat. Rural seats tend to be physically large with a low population. Semi-urban is mostly larger towns and/or numerous small towns, may include villages as well. Urban however is referred to cities where a majority of the seat is covered by some form of urban development (Politweet.org, 2013).

portals, *Harian Metro* via *hmetro.com.my* is in the fourth place for the category of top news portals but first place in the category of Malay news portal with 615,000 unique visitors. Meanwhile, other news portals are *sinarharian.com.my* with 568,000, *utusan.com.my* with 551,000, *bharian.com.my* with 501,000, and *nst.com.my* with 384,000 unique visitors. This clearly shows that the Malay presses through their online versions have appealed to many readers especially the Malays. This also proves that many readers have turned to online version of the newspapers rather than the print versions because they are free and easy to access.

These online news portals have also grown very fast. This can be seen through the number of fans and followers of these online news portals on Facebook and Twitter (Media Prima, 2012). For instance, *NST Online* and *@NST_Online* have increased the number of its fans on Facebook from 49,268 fans in December 2011 to 269,250 fans in November 2014 and on Twitter from 20,168 followers to 186,585 followers in the same periods. The Malay presses also performed well in getting the fans and followers such as *Harian Metro* in the same periods which received on Facebook from 344,205 fans to 1,993,186 fans and *@hmetromy* on Twitter from 13,192 followers to 308,040 followers. *Berita Harian* also increased the numbers from 471,729 to 2,414,644 Facebook fans and 126,456 to 782,596 *@bharianmy* Twitter followers. When compared these Facebook fans and Twitter followers with the *Malaysiakini*'s Malay and English versions of Facebook and Twitter, this paper manages to find a very interesting finding. In November 2014, the Malay version of *Malaysiakini* with 878,416 fans is slightly more popular on Facebook than the English version with 819,178 fans. However, the English version of *Malaysiakini* is hugely more popular on Twitter with 267,589 followers than the Malay version with 51,295 followers in the same month. Based on the findings, the Malay presses are still having big demands among the readers who live either in urban, suburban or rural areas. It is true that the print version is preferable by the rural old folks, but the online version of it is still hugely essential and subscribed by the urbanites.

Based on the above arguments, although there are decreasing trend of circulation for the Malay press which are actually threatening their survival, the Malay press will still appeal to the traditional readers who prefer to read print newspaper rather than online newspaper especially in rural areas. With the increasing number of new and young voters in the next general election, which love technology such as mobile phone and are Internet-savvy, without doubt print media will evolving more as online news portals.

Conclusion

This paper traced the brief history of Malay press. The way the Malay press established was similar to the way other vernacular press such as Chinese and Indian presses. It was to be the news for a particular community that the presses represented. For the Malay press, it traced their struggle to protect and championing the Malay causes. It did not move away from national politics especially on issues such as race and religion. This paper showed how quickly the political party like UMNO realised about the powerful roles of print media and controlled it instantly starting with the *Utusan Melayu*. Today, almost all print media are controlled directly and indirectly by the BN and UMNO through ownership of companies and laws that restrict the roles of printing press.

These elements of controls brought a huge effect to the print media because the BN can project their agenda, policies and beliefs to the public when the public sphere of media was controlled by them. This is clear when the print media such as *Utusan Malaysia* and *Berita Harian* through close-link companies to the BN produced coverage and reporting which were biased for the BN during the 13th general election in 2013. However, there was a newspaper called *Sinar Harian* which became popular due to its approaches which were open and gave balanced coverage to all parties. The biasness of *Utusan Malaysia* and *Berita Harian* and balanced coverage of *Sinar Harian* were evident in articles published on the issues about race and religion.

The state has powerful roles to define Islam and enforce it through the Islamisation policy. The state has defined Islam in Malaysia only based on the *Sunni* sect and mainly the *Shafie* school. Therefore, this

paper had able to proof that the Malay print media was crucial to be used to project and propagate the Islamisation agenda. Lately, the Malay rights groups like PERKASA also joined in their struggle against any element considered as threat to Islamisation agenda, even though they were more seen as to defend the state and UMNO rather than Islam itself. The close collaboration between the state and Malay rights groups with the print media such as *Utusan Malaysia* has triggered some concerns on inter and intra-race relations.

Based on the coverage, issues of race and religion were utilised in the general election to give significant impact for voters to support political parties. The target was to gain votes as many as they can get through the coverage. Although the Malay-Muslims issues seemed able to attract and gain the Malay-Muslims' votes in the general election, the non-Malays especially were distant themselves from BN and gave the votes to the PR. The strategy employed by these print media especially *Utusan Malaysia* and *Berita Harian* was just enough to ensure the BN won the general election but it somehow weakens the race relations in Malaysia. Shad Saleem Faruqi, for instance, argued that racial and religious polarisation in Malaysia has reached alarming levels since the 1990s and the country has become a 'nation of strangers' (Zachariah, 2014b). Faruqi explains that "Our children are being taught not to say 'Rest in Peace' to people of different faiths, they are told not to go houses of those of other religions, otherwise their faith will be threatened. Extremism has become mainstream and moderation is seen as capitulation to other races and religions, and as a betrayal of one's own community" (Zachariah, 2014b: 1). Thus, religious and racial harmony is crucial for Malaysia and its survival in the future. And print media should promote racial and religious harmony, not racial and religious hatred.

However, the downturn trend of circulation for print media has threatened their survival. Not only they are losing readers because of their biasness for the ruling party, but the threat is also coming from the online media and social media which are appealing to the younger generation and young voters. Without the support of the ruling party especially UMNO, many of these newspapers would not have survived. Further, many of these print media are trying to diversify their coverage and establish the online version of their newspapers.

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